

Guest Post: Empower Yourself Through Self-Advocacy

Kirsten Barraclough

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The next Utah Disability Advocacy Day will be on January 19, 2022. Advocacy activities can either be on a grand scale (speaking with legislators) or a small scale (speaking with people in everyday life). Someone can advocate on behalf of someone else, or for themselves. All forms of advocacy have their place. This blog post will focus on the importance of self-advocacy in everyday situations.

An advocate is someone who supports a cause, policy, or person. Some advocates speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Thus, often the first advocate in someone's life is their parent or guardian. Self-advocacy means that you take ownership of your situation and say what your own needs are. One of the biggest benefits is the way you feel inside when you advocate for yourself. When I advocate for myself, even in small ways, I feel proud and empowered. It gives me a sense of control over my life. When I get the help I need through being my own advocate, my disability is easier to handle. Self-advocacy is needed in nearly all aspects of life, including at school, church, making healthcare and financial decisions, in the workplace, and in your personal relationships.

Here are some tips to become a better self-advocate. First, recognize your worth and value as a human being and that your opinion matters. Second, recognize that it is scary and will be hard. Third, it will take a lot of practice, so do it as often as you can. Fourth, strive to articulate yourself as kindly as possible while getting your point across. People are less likely to know what you need if you are wishy

washy. They are also less likely to do what you need if you ask in an angry or mean-spirited way. Assertiveness is necessary, but meanness is not. Being mean usually provokes anger for both parties, it doesn't feel good, and your needs still aren't met.

When I was in kindergarten through high school, a lot of the barriers of attending school were removed through the advocacy of others. People like my parents, teachers, aides, and therapists helped make sure I had what I needed. In fact, I don't recall saying a single thing when I went to my IEP meetings. All I remember is that my mom would bring muffins to share with everyone.

Then when I went to college, everything changed. I was expected to ask for my own accommodations in class, get around campus, etc. If my notetaker didn't show up to class, I took my own notes or got notes from someone else, and then I followed up with my notetaker about whether they got notes from others that I could have. The Disability Resource Center was available to me, but if I hadn't gone into the building and explained what I needed, they wouldn't have done anything for me. I got the help I needed from them and ended up graduating Magna cum Laude with a 3.9 GPA. In the process, I began to explore how to advocate for myself. I learned a lot, and I'm still learning. You will never be perfect at self-advocacy, but it's important to strive to improve.

In college, I found it relatively simple to advocate for myself because I had a clearly defined goal to succeed in my classes and get my degree. With this clear goal, I was motivated to get the help I needed. It's necessary to get your motivation from within rather than seeking validation from other people.

After college, I realized that being in the real world was more complicated than getting your homework done. At this point, self-advocacy is even more important because you are making your own goals and determining your own future.

So don't be afraid to share your thoughts, feelings, talents, and perspective. There's only one person out there who is you.